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## SERMON LVII.

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### THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD.

Exodus, iii. 14.—*And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM.*

THOUGH Moses was born to be Israel's deliverer, yet no intimation of the divine purpose was given him till he was eighty years of age. Then, while tending the flocks of Jethro, his father-in-law, upon the borders of Horeb, he was called from his humble employment of leading sheep, to be the leader of God's chosen people. The manner of this call was suited to the magnitude of the occasion. "The angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire, out of the midst of a bush." From this bush, Moses heard a voice calling him by name, and commanding him to put his shoes from off his feet, as a token that the spot where he stood was consecrated by this vision of Jehovah. Filled with astonishment and awe, at the display of glory so refulgent, Moses hid his face, while God proceeded to invest him with a sacred commission. "Come now, I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

While the proud and ignorant grasp at preferment, and deem themselves competent to the highest undertakings, real worth is self-diffident. The wise man shrinks from the perplexities and perils of public life, while he sees "the tallest pines most beaten by the tempest, and the loftiest mountains oftenest smitten by the thunder." Three times did Moses excuse himself from obeying the heavenly call. Though the fittest man on earth, for the service assigned him; eminent for learning, experience, faith, and holy valor; yet he pleaded, "who am I?" If such a humbling message is to be carried to the monarch of Egypt, why should a shepherd of Midian be selected as the messenger? He pleaded the unbelief of his brethren: "They will not hearken to my voice, for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee." He pleaded his own personal defects: "I am not eloquent, but am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue."

Though the firmest courage might well have shrunk from an undertaking so arduous as that to which Moses was called, especially had it not been attended with explicit assurance of divine aid, yet the prospect of personal sufferings involved in the case, doubtless had an undue influence on the good man's feelings. It was, however, a dictate of wisdom, that he should ask

for plain and positive instructions, in the fulfilment of a miraculous commission, where the best human powers must prove altogether inadequate ; and in compliance with such a request, God gave that sublime description of his own incomprehensible being, which I have chosen for a text. "And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you ; and they shall say unto me, What is his name ?—what shall I say unto them ? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM : thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel ; I AM hath sent me unto you." 'There is a majestic simplicity in this language, that sinks into contempt the pomp and splendor of titles, in which the littleness of worldly magnificence is often arrayed.'

"I AM THAT I AM : " I exist independently and immutably. In this expression, all the divine perfections are, perhaps, in some sense comprehended. But our attention will now be limited to the doctrine, as being especially taught in the text, that *Jehovah is unchangeable*.

The proof of this doctrine will be exhibited briefly, as deduced from two sources of argument. That God is unchangeable, appears,

*First ;* From what we know of his *other* attributes.

The light of reason is competent to teach us, that there is a self-existent being. To suppose that there ever was a period when no such being existed, is absurd. It implies that there was a period when there was *absolutely nothing* ; no agent in the universe ; no cause to act, and produce effects : and this amounts to the supposition that there is no such thing as positive existence *now*. They must be verily fools, and without excuse, who, against the evidence of their own senses and understanding, say "there is no God." The smallest effect of divine power, as really as the greatest ; the insect that we tread upon, no less than the globe we inhabit ; the atom that floats in the sunbeam, no less than the sun itself, constrain us to acknowledge an intelligent, uncreated first cause. The train of argument, in this case, is plain to the intellect of a child.

Without entering at all into the controverted question, to what extent the light of reason is adequate to teach the character of God, it is enough for our present purpose, that his character is fully taught in the Bible. We are assured, for example, that he is infinite in *goodness*, infinite in *knowledge*, infinite in *power*. The simple inquiry before us is, Are these attributes subject to change ?

Now change in any being implies increase, or diminution, or entire removal of certain properties. To suppose any attribute of God to *cease* entirely, is to suppose that he ceases to be God. Change, then, if it occur at all, must imply either *increase* or *diminution* of his perfections. On this principle, it is easy to see, that the least change, in the degree of his *power*, for example, must make him more than almighty, or less than almighty ; the least change in his *knowledge* must make him more than omniscient, or less than omniscient ; in other words, the least change in a perfect and infinite being is inconceivable.

*Secondly*; That Jehovah is unchangeable, is proved from explicit and repeated declarations of the Bible. A few plain passages, in which this doctrine is affirmed, will be sufficient. In predicting the enlargement and glory of the church, under the reign of Messiah, according to ancient promise, God declares, by the prophet Malachi; "I am the Lord, I *change not*." Paul, alluding to the same attribute, as the guarantee of the divine covenant with believers, addresses Titus, his own son, after the common faith, "in hope of eternal life, which God, who *cannot lie*, promised before the world began." James concurs in the same testimony, when he affirms; "Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, *with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*." This appellation, Father of lights, has doubtless a spiritual import: but if the passage alludes, as it probably does, to the changes of the heavenly luminaries, the language is full of energy and beauty, as well as truth. We witness the varying aspects and revolutions of the orbs that roll above us, shining from evening to evening in the same firmament, but never twice exactly in the same place: But with the FATHER of lights, the CREATOR of these changing planets, there is not so much as the least shadow or resemblance of change. The devout psalmist, speaking of the eternal duration of God, contrasted with the mutability of created things, says; "Thou art the *same*, and thy years shall not fail." And the apostle to the Hebrews, in the most explicit terms, repeats the sentiment, "Who is the *same*, yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

The direct proof from the Bible, that Jehovah is unchangeable, might be greatly extended, but I trust it is already sufficient. The *inferences* resulting from the truth thus established, are so important as to demand the remaining time that can be allotted to this discourse.

1. All conceptions of God, which apply *time* and *succession* to his existence, are erroneous. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." He is no *older* than he was from eternity. Age is a relative term: it implies *beginning*; but God is *eternal*. It implies *change*; but God is *unchangeable*. Time is the measure of *created* existence; but God is *uncreated*.

The manner in which we think, and even exist, renders it difficult for us to conceive of God, without applying to him our measure of time and succession. For this reason, we are liable to mistake in our conceptions of his knowledge, by attaching to it our customary associations of present, past, and future. We may grow wiser by experience or study: our knowledge is progressive; we learn one thing, and then proceed, step by step, to acquire the knowledge of other things. This holds true, even in the highest attainments of what is properly called human science. Hence, the diversity of views which we have of the same thing, at different times, results from the *imperfection* of our knowledge. Change of opinion implies liability to mistake. *Increase* of knowledge implies *past* ignorance; *decrease* of knowledge implies *present* ignorance. But neither of these can be supposed applicable to Him whose "understanding is infinite." When we speak of his *foreknowledge*,

therefore, we must not imagine that his certainty of one event is prior in time to that of another ; or that He comes to the knowledge of any thing, as we do, by deduction and inference. In the proper use of language, all we can mean by his foreknowledge is, that events which come to pass in *time*, were known to God from eternity. So that, to Him, nothing which occurs is unexpected, nothing is new.

2. God has no *new purposes*. This follows, by unquestionable inference, from his immutability. Whatever was his purpose from eternity is his purpose now : and whatever is his purpose now, was his purpose from eternity. Men change their determinations, from instability of mind ; from depravity of heart ; from want of foresight to guard against unexpected occurrences ; from want of power to accomplish what they designed ; or from regard to the power or opinion of others. But what can change the purpose of God ? Not instability of design, "for He is in one mind, and who can turn Him ?" Not want of power, for He is omnipotent : not want of foresight, for He is omniscient : not the opinion of any other being, "for who hath known the mind of the Lord, and who hath been His counsellor ?" If it is admitted then, that God has *present* purposes, it must be admitted that he has *eternal* purposes. But God *has* present purposes. If any one doubts this, the proof is at hand. The "determination of God," "his counsel," "his will," "his purpose," are phrases which, as every reader of the Bible knows, occur almost constantly in the sacred pages. What language could be more explicit than the following ?—"For every *purpose* of the Lord shall stand." "Who hath called us according to His own *purpose* and grace." "According to the *purpose* of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." This point, besides, is too evident to require elaborate proof. Did God create the universe ? Does he uphold it, and govern it ? Can any man persuade himself, that all this is done *without design* ? Do the works of creation around us, do our own bodies and minds, bear no marks of intelligence—of *purpose* in the Creator ? No man can suppose this, without denying the evidence of his own senses, and degrading the infinite God below His rational offspring : because His rational offspring do not act without purpose.

Two things then are certain : first, that God is *unchangeable* : secondly, that God has *purposes*. The inference is perfectly conclusive, that these purposes are *eternal*. This argument cannot be evaded. It has the clearness of demonstration.

Whatever difficulty may be thought to attend the doctrine of divine purposes, it lies equally in the way of all who believe the Bible : nay, it lies as much in the way of the philosophical deist, as of the believer in revelation. Deists of good sense acknowledge this : they know that this doctrine is inseparable from the existence of an intelligent God ; and that there is no getting over it, or getting round it, without plunging into the abyss of atheism.

And after all, what reasonable objection can be made to this doctrine ? Is God perfect ? Is He infinitely and immutably perfect ? And is He still unfit to frame a plan of government for a world which He has made ? Who

then is fit to do it? Who can do it? Or shall there be no plan, and every thing be left to lawless contingency! Shall these heavens cease to declare the glory of God, and this firmament to show his handy work? Shall the suns and systems of this fair universe cease to roll and shine? or wheel their circuits through the mazes of an interminable chaos? Or shall the *minds*, that God has made, as the brighter image of His own intelligence and immortality, be alone exempt from the control of their Creator? Shall He have power to "turn the rivers of water," and none to "turn the hearts of kings?"—power to still the "noise of the seas," and none to still "the tumult of the people?"—power to make plagues and earthquakes subservient to His purposes, and none to "make the wrath of man to praise him?"

To exempt the hearts and actions of men from the dominion of the infinite mind, is to consign this world to sin, and darkness, and wo, without remedy. If this world were but one hour old, who would be afraid to trust its management in the hands of Him that made it? To whose hands could it be so safely committed? Why then should we discard, or reluctantly admit the doctrine of Jehovah's eternal purposes? Let us rather shout with angels, "Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

And let it not be preposterously and presumptuously said, that the divine purposes make men mere machines. Every man is conscious that he is free. He knows, by a direct appeal to his own bosom, that his liberty is not destroyed, nor impaired, by the purposes of God; and it involves a strange mystery, indeed, to affirm that the unchanging determination of Heaven that all men shall be free agents, subverts their freedom.

3. The certainty of final salvation to true believers is a reasonable doctrine, grounded on the immutable truth of God, as implied in the promises of the new covenant. These promises of the unchanging God must be fulfilled. Every real saint, therefore, will certainly be upheld, I do not say in constant obedience, but so upheld in faith and holiness, as to be saved.

Is this doctrine denied, because it is supposed to interfere with moral agency? Cannot the moral liberty of the saint be secured, without putting at everlasting hazard his soul and his salvation? Ask the humble Christian; when he prays for upholding grace, does he feel that he is asking God to take away his freedom? He feels no such difficulty.

Look now at the dreadful result to which this objection leads. If there are no promises of unfailing support to the believer, then any individual saint is liable to become a reprobate, and perish. If one is thus liable, so is another; so is a third; so is the whole number of the faithful. What then becomes of the precious promises made by our Saviour? On the above supposition, there is no security that he will be with his ministers, or that he will have ministers, to the end of the world. There is no security that he will have a church at any future period. Nay, there is no security that another child of Adam will ever be saved. Nor does the difficulty stop here: if saints on earth, in order to be free, must be liable to fall away and perish: for the same reason, there can be no such thing as confirmed holiness and happiness, in



*heaven.* Let the validity of this objection be admitted there, and what dismay must it spread through that world of light! Who could say that Paul will not lose his crown, and drop from his shining station; and Gabriel suspend his notes of praise, to become a rebel and a reprobate; and the defection spread around the throne of God, till not a saint or seraph is left to strike the song of Moses and the Lamb! Admit the sentiment, that God cannot consistently make promises of upholding grace to his people, or that it is possible for Him or His promises to change, and the covenant of grace loses all its stability; you turn the charter of the church into a blank; you spoil the Christian's Bible; you take away his rock, and set him on a wave; you leave him no solid foundation for either faith, joy, or hope.

4. When God is said to *repent*, it implies no *change in His character or purposes*. As the parent accommodates his language to the capacity of his child, so God, in condescension to human weakness, speaks of himself in terms adapted to our conceptions. Hence we read of his arm, his hand, his eye. So when he changes his dealings, it is said that he *repents*, because, in *men*, a change of *conduct* usually proceeds from a change of *purpose*. The Bible is not a system of metaphysics: it is a plain book, designed to teach the sublime truths of religion, in language most familiar to the understandings of men. Hence, when we are told that God *repents*, it implies no mutability, no defect of goodness or wisdom, no mistake or disappointment; it merely implies that he varies his dispensations, according to the character of moral agents; or in other words, that he changes his conduct towards changing creatures.

5. The immutability of God is no discouragement to prayer, but the best ground of encouragement. The inference has been a thousand times drawn, that it must be vain for us to pray, because our petitions can produce no change in God. This inference is as repugnant to sound reasoning, as it is to the precepts of the Bible, and the spirit of piety. If Jehovah were fickle, like earthly monarchs, then, indeed, it would be vain to pray. No one could ever know with what services he would be pleased, or on what terms his favor might be obtained. You do not trust in a fickle *man*; and how could you trust in a fickle *God*? But as the case is, there can be no uncertainty. Eternal truth is pledged, that the humble, contrite, praying soul shall be blessed; and that they who cast off fear, and restrain prayer, shall be destroyed. Can stronger motives to duty be offered? The answer of prayer implies no change in the mind of God. Still a change of moral temper in *us*, may prepare the way for a change in his *treatment* of us. Such a change in us, every prayer, offered in the spirit of the Gospel, supposes: and, therefore, such a prayer an immutable God may be expected to hear in mercy.

6. The unchangeable perfection of God, is a doctrine full of comfort to his people. This world, with all its concerns, bears the stamp of mutability. It furnishes no objects on which the good man may safely fix his affections,

or repose his hopes of happiness. Can he confide in himself? His own heart, alas, is too treacherous to be trusted. His best purposes, his best joys, are inconstant. To-day, perhaps, he meets God, in the sanctuary; meets God, at the communion-table; meets God, in the closet;—has some soul-refreshing views of his glory, and rises almost to the ecstasy of an angel. To-morrow, he sinks again into darkness, and is a poor worm of the earth. Some interposing cloud of unbelief shuts him away from God, his spirit droops, his heart becomes cold, his comforts die.—And is he the only inconstant man, among the followers of Christ? Around him he sees all, all is fluctuation. Some whom he deemed shining Christians, turned apostates; churches, once distinguished for their attachment to pure religion, sunk into pernicious errors; pulpits, where Mathers and Whitefields prayed and preached, occupied by men who “deny the Lord that bought them.” Nay, if he extend his view to remoter periods, he sees the churches, which were planted by Paul and his illustrious associates, become extinct; and the very spot where the Saviour died for the redemption of men, now to be rescued from the grossest darkness, by missionaries of the cross from distant countries!

And if stability is not found in the concerns of religion itself, shall he expect to find it in mere *earthly* objects? Here his brightest prospects are liable to be suddenly overcast. To-day, perhaps, finds him in prosperity, clasping some beloved object to his heart; to-morrow may tear away that object, and wring that heart with agony. Ask the aged man whose eyes are dim with years, who looks around him to find the associates of his youthful days, and they are all gone to the grave,—does he doubt that this world is mutable? Ask the man of business, one hour possessed of a princely estate, and the next, thrust down to bankruptcy and beggary,—does he doubt that this world is mutable? Ask the weeping mother, who bends over the dying pillow of her son; while she sees the object of her fondest cares and hopes smitten with a deadly disease, and the face that lately bloomed with health, covered with a mortal paleness,—does she doubt that this world is mutable? Ah! brethren, this is a changing world. Its history, indeed, is but a history of changes. “As for man,” its noblest inhabitant, “his days are as grass, as the flower of the field so he flourisheth, the wind passeth over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more.” Heroes that made the earth tremble, have gone down to the grave. Families, that in the arrogance of pride and power, exacted the homage of millions, have been forgotten. Cities, renowned as seats of learning, arts, and opulence, have fallen into ruins. Such this world has been, and such it will be, till that last, great change, which shall close all the changes of time, “when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.”

Amid these scenes of fluctuation, is there no object then in heaven or earth that is unchanging? Yes, *one*: *God* is unchanging. Here is stability.

“His hand the good man fastens on the skies,  
“And bids earth roll,—nor heeds her idle whirl.”

God is his happiness, therefore his happiness is certain and everlasting. What though earthly comforts are transitory, earthly friends frail and changeable ; God is a friend, sincere, unfailing, almighty. While his judgments fill the wicked with dismay, "there is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God." While his thunder rends the heavens, he whispers peace to his people. Tempest and uproar may sweep over the earth, but the church will live, will triumph : her God is unchanging, and He has said that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. "The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved ; He uttered his voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us ; the God of Jacob is our refuge : therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea ; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled ; though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Blessed, O Lord of Hosts, is the man that trusteth in thee."

*Lastly ;* The immutability of God is a doctrine full of terror to his enemies. To each of you, my impenitent hearers, this subject speaks with alarming authority. You have a controversy with Jehovah. This controversy cannot cease, without a change in *Him*, or in *you*. He cannot change, for the least alteration in his character would mar its perfection, and subvert his moral government. You will not change, for you are supremely in love with sin. What must be the result of this controversy ? I tremble to declare a truth so awful, and yet so certain ;—it must be your eternal ruin, if you remain at enmity with God. How can it be otherwise ? The wheel of Divine government moves steadily forward. You, an insect, dare to take your stand before it, to oppose its progress ; and shall you not be crushed ? Why will you suspend your only hope of safety on impossibility ? Can you escape Omniscience ? Can you resist Omnipotence ? Can you imagine that He who is immutably holy and true, will cease to abhor, or forget to punish sin ? No ;—you must turn to God, by timely and true repentance, or, I say again, you are certainly, you are eternally undone. Though now his vengeance slumbers, he has wrath in store for the ungodly. "Hath he *said*, and shall he not *do* it ? hath he *spoken*, and shall he not *make it good* ?" "The wicked are reserved to the day of destruction, they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath ; the zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall do this."



## SERMON LVIII.

By ALVAN HYDE, D.D.

LEE, MASSACHUSETTS.

### THE NATURE AND REASONABLENESS OF SUBMISSION TO GOD.

II KINGS, vii. 3, 4.—*And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate; and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? If we say, we will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.*

THIS resolution was formed by men, whose lives were truly in jeopardy. They saw no more prospect of escaping death than the sinner, who is deeply convicted of his lost state, sees of escaping the everlasting wrath of a holy God. These men were Israelites, belonging to Samaria, and lived in the wicked reign of Jehoram, the son of Ahab. Provoked by the sins of Israel, God raised up Benhadad, king of Syria, as his rod of correction; who came with an army and besieged Samaria. He continued the blockade until he brought on a famine in the city, which threatened all the inhabitants with death. Instances occurred in which mothers laid violent hands upon their children to satisfy the cravings of hunger in their families. At this awful juncture, there were in Israel four men infected with the plague of leprosy; and according to the law of Moses, they were commanded, being unclean, to dwell alone without the camp. Their situation was more deplorable than that of those who remained in the city, as they had fewer sources of help.

That eminent prophet, Elisha, was at this time in Samaria, a witness of this appalling scene of suffering and distress, and was even charged, by the wicked king of Israel, as being instrumental of it all. When this famine was at its height, and when death, in the most frightful form, seemingly was about to enter every house, Elisha boldly prophesied, that there would be an abundant supply for the sufferers, the next day; an event which then appeared impossible. Addressing the people with a loud voice, he said, "Thus saith the Lord; To-morrow, about this time, shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria." This drew forth a scoffing reply from a man, on whose hand the king leaned, who daringly insinuated, that if the Lord would make windows in heaven, such a thing could not be. "Behold," said the man of God, "thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." All this was fulfilled the following day.

The four lepers, at the gate, not knowing what the prophet had said, and viewing death to be certain, whether they went into the city, or abode where they were, adopted the remarkable resolution in the text. They said one to another, *Why sit we here until we die? If we say, we will enter into the city,*

*then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there ; and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians : if they save us alive, we shall live ; and if they kill us, we shall but die.* These men, putting their lives in their hands, threw themselves on the mercy of those, from whom they had no reason to expect any favor. Death was before them, and they said, *we shall but die.* While they were forming this resolution, the Lord was marvellously, and miraculously, effecting their *deliverance* and *safety*. They went to the Syrians without having *one condition* to propose, not knowing but their lives would be immediately taken, and that too in a cruel manner ; but to their great surprise, there was not an enemy in the camp. All their wants were abundantly supplied at once.

This remarkable account is fitted to remind us of the resolution which the sinner forms of turning unto God, when brought to *see* and *feel* the necessity of his case. It also reminds us of the *manner*, in which the returning sinner approaches to God, without having *one condition* to propose ; resigning his everlasting portion into the hands of one whom he has *offended*. It is true, the cases are not, in all respects, parallel ; but it must be acknowledged, that the resolution formed by these men is a striking picture of the resolution of the returning broken-hearted sinner. In *their* case, nothing farther is brought into view than the disorder of their bodies ; their distress for want of food, and their exposure to temporal death. But returning sinners have been made sensible of a malady in their *souls* ; and whatever way they turned their eyes, eternal destruction was before them. We have no occasion to decide the *moral* state of these men.—Whatever this might be, they formed the same resolution with respect to their *temporal* safety, which sinners ought to form, with respect to their *eternal* safety. In the extremity of their distress, they resolved to throw themselves upon the *mercy of the Syrians*, from whom they had no ground to expect favor : Sinners are bound, from every consideration, to cast themselves upon the mercy of God, whom they have highly provoked, but who has made ample provision for their reinstatement in his favor, and given his word that he will *abundantly* pardon, as soon as they return. Surely sinners, who act freely, and always in view of motives, ought to be as solicitous to secure the interest of their *immortal souls*, as these unhappy men were to obtain relief for their *bodies*. This truth is so obvious, that it must commend itself to their consciences. They are then invited to a serious consideration of the following points :—

I. The present condition of impenitent sinners involves *certain death*, or the *loss of their souls*.

II. The only *wise* and *safe* step is to surrender themselves *unreservedly* into the hands of God.

III. If they do this, the God of all grace will effect their *deliverance* and bring *salvation* to them.

The interesting occurrence before us, recorded by the Holy Spirit for our instruction, presents the case of those, who saw death staring them in the face, whatever way they turned their eyes. But *temporal death*, though it assail us in the most awful shape, is not to be compared with another death of which

the Scriptures abundantly speak. I refer to the death of the *soul*; which is an evil infinitely more to be deprecated than to pine away with hunger. What *is* the death of the soul? Not its annihilation, or ceasing to exist, but its losing all hope, all restraints, and sinking into everlasting horror and wretchedness. The soul is capable of experiencing this death; and, according to the testimony of God, is exposed to it; yea, more, it is an evil which is inevitable without repentance. To this immense loss the Saviour referred in the following words:—"What is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" When a *soul dies*, or when a sinner loses his soul, he ceases for ever to be a prisoner of hope, and plunges into a state of *endless despair*. He is banished from all good, and separated unto all evil. This is the second death. Annihilation, dreaded as it is, is not to be compared with such an evil. But the present condition of impenitent sinners involves the *certainly* of this death, no less than the condition of the lepers involved the certainty of their famishing with hunger. We are, then, brought to contemplate an *awful fact*, and one on which no impenitent sinner, unless his conscience has become seared, can dwell without trembling. That there is no ground to question the fact now stated, is evident from *divine threatenings*.

The reality and awful import of these threatenings should be seriously pondered. What did God say to *Adam*, when stating to him what would be the inevitable consequence of his disobedience? *In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die*: or dying, thou shalt die. The import of this first threatening to man is, In the day thou *sinnest*, thou shalt be for ever undone, as to help in thyself, or in any other creature. Thou shalt sink into a state, which will be *hopeless*. This was particularly addressed to Adam, and through him, as a federal head, to all his posterity. Accordingly we find the divine denunciation afterward was—*The soul* (meaning any person) *that sinneth shall die*. The momentous question may then be put:—Have we not *all* sinned? Have we not *all* broken the divine law? Are we not *all* under the curse? Admitting this as a truth, which cannot be denied, it will follow, that our present condition, if we are in a state of nature, is such as should awaken all our anxieties. We are undone, and for ever undone, as to any help in *ourselves*, or in any *created arm*. As transgressors of the divine law, we are threatened with eternal death, and by the Holy Legislator himself. He regards his violated law, as being infinitely more important than *we* are, or even the *whole created system*. "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." Let us, then, look which way we will, eternal death stares us in the face. If we have not taken refuge in Christ, the threatenings of an infinitely holy God stand with all their force against us. He is bound, by his word, to render "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil." *The wages of sin is death*. This is the testimony of God. Certainly, then, our present condition, if we are living in sin, involves the certain loss of our souls, no less than the condition of the lepers, while the famine prevailed, involved the certainty of their perishing with hunger.

The same truth, respecting the condition of sinners, is evident from the *state of their hearts*. Does not the Holy Spirit represent them, as being *dead in trespasses and sins*? In all those, who are under the power and dominion of sin, the work of ruin has already begun. They carry death in their souls. They now have the same temper of heart, which is possessed by those who have died in their sins, and are already beyond the reach of hope; and differ from them in no other respect, than that they are in a state of probation, and under great restraints. Whither are the corrupt propensities of their hearts *leading* them, and *rapidly leading* them? To this inquiry, there can be but one answer;—they are leading them on to interminable wo! Looking, then, to the state of their hearts, we are compelled to say, their present condition must issue in their everlasting ruin. When we see a person languishing in the last stage of a *consumption*, or whose body is nearly consumed with a *cancer*, the impression is deeply made on our minds, that death is unavoidable. No less strongly do the hearts of *all sinners*, while such, indicate the approach of *eternal death*.

Further, all unbelievers are represented, in God's word, as being *now* in a state of condemnation. Look at the following plain testimony of Christ: *He that believeth not is condemned already; because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God*. For the same reason he says, *The wrath of God abideth on him*. This is the uniform language of the sacred Scriptures, respecting the state and condition of all who live in unbelief. If impenitent sinners would attend seriously to their case, they would find themselves no less exposed to the rigour of the law, than if Christ had never died; they would even see, that the law has *greater* demands on this account. They may be compared to a criminal, who has had his *trial*, been found *guilty*, and has received sentence of *death*. The Lord has written their *characters*, and their *sentence*, as with sunbeams. Though at present wholly occupied with worldly pursuits, and busy here and there, they want not evidence of their alarming condition.

In faithfulness, I must add another affecting thought:—all unbelievers have taken their stand among God's enemies, and if they *remain* there, their destruction is as certain as the *truth* of God. In the great struggle between sin and holiness they have chosen their side. They belong to a kingdom which is destined to be overthrown; and all its adherents, of every grade, must inevitably perish in its ruins. The word has gone out of the mouth of the Lord. Can it then fail? Can the wicked hope to succeed against the arm of the Almighty! Their present condition, standing as they do among the enemies of Jehovah, is as certainly connected with the *loss of their souls*, as the condition of the unhappy men, in the text, having nothing to allay their hunger, was connected with the *death of their bodies*. In this awfully exposed situation, what can they do? This interesting question will be answered by showing,

II. That the only *wise* and *safe* step is to surrender themselves *unreservedly* into the hands of God.

They must act the part of the famishing lepers. Like them, they have an

important *decision* to make; a decision which must prompt them to act in view of danger, and to act without delay. The resolution of these distressed men, as it was immediately followed by corresponding actions, furnished evidence of their having an irresistible conviction of the *necessity* of their case. So pungent was this conviction, that it *aroused* them; and they felt that what *could* be done, must be done *immediately*. It was certain death to remain where they were, or to go into the city, and it could be no more than certain death to go to the Syrians, who were their *avowed enemies*; and, at that time, thirsting for their blood. They resolved on the *latter*; not knowing how they should be disposed of, and yet it being the only course which presented to their anxious minds the least *gleam* of hope.

The condition of sinners, as to their immortal souls, is, at least in some respects, similar to that of these men. It is certain death to remain where they are, in a state of *unbelief* and *impenitence*—and it is certain death to attempt merely to work out a righteousness of their own. They are now in “the broad way that leadeth to destruction,” and urged onward by powers of earth and hell; and should they arouse, and make resistance, relying on their *own strength*, or on any *created arm*, it would be wholly without avail. They would still be in the same “broad way.” Their only alternative is to turn and make an unreserved surrender of themselves to the mercy of that God, whom they have offended. Nowhere else can help be found for perishing sinners.

But what state of feelings would be implied in their *coming* to this resolution? What do they *believe*? Of what truths are they now *convinced*?—One thing of which they have gained a full conviction is, that their case is *deplorable*. They realize, that they must inevitably perish, if they remain where they now are. They see nothing but *death* before them. They have taken their last morsel—and see that in themselves there is no help. This is *one* conviction they have. Nor is this all.—They see they have *no claims*. If they go to God for relief, they see they must go, as *sinners*, and justly condemned. They must go with an entire consciousness of having acted the part of God's enemies, and, on this account, loathing and abhorring themselves. It is a feeling common to sinners, that they must make themselves better before they submit to God. They are looking for some course, which they may take, as *preparatory* to their submitting. But the only thing which will recommend them, as sinners, is a sense of *utter vileness* and *unworthiness*. How did the repenting prodigal feel? “Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” This feeling is an entire renunciation of all-claims.

When sinners surrender themselves unconditionally to God, they leave it with him to dispose of them, as he sees best. They are calm and happy, when, in their *feelings*, they take this ground. They have no conditions to offer—no reserves to make. The famishing men, whose deplorable condition, whose painful struggle of mind and firm resolution are kept in view to impress *truth* and *duty* upon sinners, counted the cost before they decided on casting themselves upon the mercy of the Syrians. All they had to say was,



"If they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die." In like manner, when a sinner surrenders himself unreservedly to God, he casts himself upon his *mere mercy*. No conditions does he state. But here the *selfish, unsubdued heart* recoils. The prayer of sinners who are in some degree awakened, but who are not humbled, is of the following import;—"Lord, we will give up all to thee, if we can only first have satisfactory evidence that our *souls shall be saved*." This, however, is consistent with perfect selfishness. They demand other evidence than the word of God furnishes, that he will *save them*, before they can feel willing to submit themselves to his disposal. What *greater* or more *assuming* condition could they state? They have no confidence in God, no love for his character, no faith in his promises, unless he will now make some extraordinary manifestation of his kindness to *them*. An infinite favor they demand, before they can confide in him, and devote themselves to his service. They seek their own interest, and nothing else. Selfishness is supreme. But is this the submission which the gospel enjoins? Do such feelings resemble the self-denying religion of the Lord Jesus, who gave his *life* for his people? No candid mind will hesitate to answer. Could the unhumbled sinner know, that God would treat him according to his real deserts, he would, at once, abandon all thought of submission. He is not *prepared* to leave it with a holy God to do with him as he sees best. He is not prepared for any other decision than to have his own will granted. Often is the nature of this submission exemplified among men in the expression of their feelings, with respect to worldly concerns. When, in their dealings with each other, there is a collision of interests, they contend earnestly for their respective claims. The points in dispute, in which they feel a deep interest, they *pretend* to submit to the decision of impartial judges, but when the result is known, they betray the unreconciled state of their minds. But where there is true submission, the whole matter is left. The sinner, in giving up himself to God, acknowledges *ill-desert*, renounces *claims*, and casts himself on divine mercy, without any conditions or reserves. If he save me, I shall live, and if he cut me off, I shall but have the just reward of my iniquities. In view of his wretched case, he says, "Not my will, but thine be done." So taught the Saviour—"He that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it." The only wise and safe course, then, for lost sinners, is to make an unconditional surrender of themselves to God. They must go as they are, and acknowledge themselves aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, in a lost and helpless state, and leave it with Him, who cannot err, to decide what shall be done. Nor will this be in vain. For,

III. The God of all grace will effect their *deliverance*, and bring *salvation* to them.

The distressed men, whose state and conduct are kept in view, to illustrate the nature of submission, formed their resolution, not knowing but that they should be immediately put to death. They had no assurance, nor even the least evidence, of the contrary. But, when they came to the camp, to their great surprise, not an enemy was to be seen. They had all fled. The Lord, who holdeth the hearts of all men in his hands, had discomfited them. "He

made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host : and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to come upon us." They immediately left the camp, as it was, full of every thing which these famishing men needed. This astonishing event was of the Lord, who wrought deliverance for the distressed, and brought them into the possession of abundance.

We have, then, before us a striking illustration of what the Lord, in his infinite mercy, does for sinners, as soon as they throw down their arms of rebellion, and surrender to him. When they feel compelled, from an entire conviction of their lost state, to cast themselves upon his mercy, and leave it with him to dispose of them, they are, at once, surrounded with a fulness. They come to an important decision—their proud and stubborn hearts yield—they give up their *all*, and in giving it up, they find "the pearl of great price." They find safety, peace, and happiness, where they had always refused to *seek* for them.

Fellow-sinners, there is one important point in which your case is altogether different from that of the lepers. They could have, at the most, but a *gleam of hope*. For you, in your perishing condition, ample provision has been made, and it is freely offered, "without money and without price." Christ has "come to seek and to save that which was lost." Of this most interesting fact, you have clear evidence ; yea, you have demonstration. The God of mercy never fails of sending salvation to those who cheerfully submit to him. He has given his word, that he will do it, and this is the best possible security. Why, then, are not all sinners ready to take this course ? Because they do not believe the testimony of God. They do not believe their case is desperate. They have not yet eaten their last morsel. They are for helping themselves. As soon as they abandon their own trusting places, and give up *all*, they find a rich profusion of blessings flowing in upon them, through the mediation of Christ. Then, and not till then, the glorious plan of salvation opens to their view, and Christ appears to them to be "all in all." Then, they have a sight of his infinite mercy and compassion, manifested in those words :—"Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Happy experience has taught them, that "the poor in spirit," the self-empty, "are blessed." "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

And now, impenitent sinners, having illustrated the several points proposed, I would solemnly expostulate with you, for remaining in a condition which involves *certain and eternal death*. Let the situation and conduct of these famishing men, instruct and arouse you. The inspired account of them, which you may read in your Bibles, I have improved, as a similitude, to convince you of your perishing condition, and to teach you to be wise for yourselves. The Saviour often impressed truths upon his hearers, by recurring to interesting facts, as well as by parables. When you seriously reflect on the condition of these men, sitting without the city, infected with a loathsome disease, not having a morsel of any thing to satisfy their hunger, and expecting nothing but death, in a most frightful form, do you not *pity* them ? Who

of you would not tremble to be in their wretched condition? Truly their case was pitiable, and seemingly must draw a sigh from the hardest heart; but it was nothing compared with your own. *They* were expecting *temporal death*; but what are *you* expecting, as transgressors of the divine law, bound to eternity?—or rather what have you *reason* to expect? Do you credit the testimony of God? Do you admit, what has been shown in this discourse, that the present condition of impenitent sinners involves the final ruin of their immortal souls? You will not deny it. Then all of you, who have, to this day, neglected the “great salvation,” are now bending over the eternal pit. And is this a *safe* position? Is not God, who is “angry with the wicked every day,” especially angry with those who know his overtures of mercy, and yet despise them? Have not awful threatenings against such gone out of his mouth? And, God of mercy as he is, can his *truth* fail?

I feel that I am now speaking to those, who “*know* their Master’s will,” and to whom the “*great salvation*” is sent; and that I need only appeal to conscience and the heart. Think not then, sinners, to gainsay God’s truth; nor “change it into a lie.” Rather have pity on yourselves, and no longer act against light. No longer cherish “enmity against God.” Have pity on yourselves, while the Saviour yet waits with open arms, and bleeding brow, and beseeching voice. Let his love melt you down at his feet. “Submit yourselves to God.” Your long delay of repentance evinces *deep-rooted depravity*, and the necessity of a work of the Holy Spirit. Yield yourselves then to His influence, and to your great surprise and joy, you will find yourselves made “willing in the day of his power,”—willing to act *rationally*—willing to love and serve the Lord of glory. This the gospel enjoins and conscience now urges. Why then sit you here and die, while Jesus is yet standing and knocking at your door? Rise and bid him welcome, who once poured out his life for your sake. Give him your heart—your life—your all—and “his banner over you will be Love.” AMEN.

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Come, anxious sinner, in whose breast  
A thousand thoughts revolve;  
Come, with your guilt and fear oppress,  
And make this last resolve:

“I’ll go to Jesus, though my sin  
Hath like a mountain rose;  
I know his courts, I’ll enter in,  
Whatever may oppose.

“Prostrate I’ll lie before his throne,  
And there my guilt confess;  
I’ll tell him, I’m a wretch undone  
Without his sovereign grace.

“I can but perish if I go;  
I am resolv’d to try;  
For if I stay away, I know  
I must for ever die.”